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ABSTRACT

In order for teachers to be of assistance to disturbed children it is necessary that they recognize behavioral manifestations indicative of emotional disturbances and become familiar with those approaches which have been attempted in in order to select the approach which appears most applicable to the individual child. The author describes the most common patterns of behavioral manifestations observed in the school, including patterns of acting-out behavior, withdrawn behavior, and psychotic behavior. Language arts for these children should have the same long-range goals as language arts for nonhandicapped children. Language arts for the various types of behavior already described are outlined. The author also suggests various educational and auxiliary services that would aid disturbed children. References are included. (Author/NH)

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THE EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILD

"Language Arts for the Emotionally Disturbed Child"

Some teachers don't know what to do for the disturbed children in their classrooms. Others are uncertain as to what they should or shouldn't do. Still others are frustrated by limited or nonexistent special services which they have learned are necessary for the therapeutic treatment and education of disturbed children.

If teachers are to be of assistance to disturbed children it is necessary that they recognize behavioral manifestations indicative of emotional disturbance. It is also necessary that they become familiar with those approaches which have been attempted in order to select the approach which appears most applicable to the individual child.

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Teachers should realize that they can be no more effective than their individual knowledge, skills, school and community resources, and the degree to which individual children are disturbed permit. Those teachers who realize their limitations and request the assistance of other professionals (such as psychiatrists, psychologists, school counselors, and social workers) will be of more assistance to a child than those who do not.

BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS INDICATIVE OF EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

The following behavioral manifestations of emotional disturbance are by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, they represent the most common patterns observed in the school.

Patterns of Acting-Out Behavior

Acting-out behavior is the most prevalent behavioral manifestation of emotional disturbance in children. Acting-out behavior may be either overt (directly observable) or covert (indirectly observable).

Pattern 1 The child who is exposed to excessive stress in his home and/or school may become anxious or build up an intense feeling of resentment which he is unable to control when provoked. The child demonstrates his anxiety by squirming about in his seat, manipulating his materials or various parts of his body (such às twisting his hair and ears or sucking his fingers), and getting out of his seat a gread deal. He may suddenly explode over the least provocation and demonstrate his anger by destroying his work or verbally or physically attacking another child or his teacher.

Pattern 2 A child may associate school with previous negative experiences. For example, some teachers are emotionally unstable themselves and scream at, strike, throw things at, or are otherwise unkind to the children they teach. A child who has the misfortune of being in the room of such a teacher may openly avoid or violently protest school attendance even though he may not have the same teacher at a later date. A parent may cause the same condition by his or her evening tirades while helping the child with his homework.

Pattern 3 The child who for some reason resents adult authority may express his hostility by openly refusing to cooperate in the school. To the child's mind, this is the most effective way of showing contempt and punishing the adult or adults whom he resents. Such behavior sometimes occurs when there is a cultural or value conflict between the child and his teacher. In some cases, the child is reluctant to give in to the teacher and lose face with other like-minded friends in his class. In some cases, however, a child identifies with the attitude of a parent who is contemptuous of schools and teachers. Unfortunately, some teachers fail to see indirect expressions of hostility but rather interpret them as lack of motivation. Thus, such children fall farther and farther behind in their studies until it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to catch up.

Pattern 4 Parents may unfavorably compare one of their children with a brother or sister who is or has been more successful in school. The unfavorably compared child becomes angry but is ashamed to express his feelings. Therefore, he acts out covertly by refusing to put effort into the acquisition of those skills taught in the school. A similar

pattern of behavior may be observed when a child resents a parent who is enthusiastic about school and learning. The child covertly directs his hostility toward the parent by refusing to do well in school.

Pattern 5 An overly ambitious parent may push a child for academic achievement until the child rebels by abandoning academic pursuits. The child may be observed to suddenly abandon academic studies in favor of other activities--in some cases, undesirable.

Patterns of Withdrawn Behavior

Withdrawn behavior is less obvious than acting-out behavior, and, unless teachers are observant, withdrawn children are often overlooked or labeled "lazy".

Pattern 1 A child may be overprotected and made overly-dependent during early childhood. This is particularly true for the child who is an only child for five or six years. Such a child may feel that he has been sent to school so his mother can give her full attention and affection to a brother or sister born shortly before or after the child's entrance into school. The child transfers his dependency needs onto his teacher by demanding a disproportionate share of attention. He refuses to participate in learning activities unless he has his teacher's undivided attention. When such attention is not immediately forthcoming he sulks and withdraws from group activities.

Pattern 2 In a broken home or a home where there is a great deal of quarreling a child may receive little affection or security and may be continually berated. The child may feel inferior to other children and

is easily convinced that he is unworthy of affection or stupid. Therefore, he gives up easily when confronted with difficulty in the acquisition of academic skills, and withdraws.

Pattern 3 A parent (and for that matter, a teacher) may feel inadequate and, in order to demonstrate his own superiority, criticize, ridicule or indirectly punish his or her child for academic achievements. The child of such a parent interprets academic success as dangerous and becomes afraid of doing well in school. He may become passive and constricted which offers safety from the parent. There is the danger that such a child will withdraw from his painful world of reality into a fantasy world where he can no longer be hurt.

Patterns of Psychotic Behavior

Due to their being more easily identified, relatively few functionally (thought to be caused by environmental causes rather than central nervous system disorders) psychotic children attend public schools. However, the following behavioral patterns are characteristic of those pre-psychotic and psychotic children who do attend.

Pattern 1 The pre-psychotic child seeks seclusion. Therefore, he avoids group activities. He appears to be in poor contact with reality although he usually doesn't demonstrate a consistent loss of reality orientation.

Pattern 2 In the primary grades, the psychotic child may demonstrate an absence or extreme limitation of speech and/or preoccupation with objects or his own body. The child may be mistakenly diagnosed as

mentally retarded. However, glimpses of average or above functioning in various areas indicate that he is emotionally rather than intellectually impaired. In some cases, such a child may become uncontrollably fearful when separated from his mother. However, this latter behavior should not be confused with the behavior of the child who has a phobic reaction to school but good reality orientation.

In the upper elementary grades the bizarre behavior of the psychotic child who has adequate speech becomes more visible through his hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that no one else can see or hear) or delusions (in which the child is convinced of the reality of quite unrealistic things).

LANGUAGE ARTS FOR EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN

Language arts for emotionally disturbed children should have the same long-range goals as language arts for non-handicapped children. However, teachers' immediate expectations and the methods by which they attempt to develop disturbed children's language skills must be initially modified to fit individual children's behavioral and learning characteristics.

The majority of reports and research investigations concerned with developing disturbed children's language skills have been conducted with either individuals or small groups. Therefore, teachers should cautiously interpret and generalize the reported successes of others in terms of application to the similar characteristics of the disturbed child they are attempting to teach and the availability of similar resources, not to mention their own unique individual qualities and competencies.

Language Arts for Acting-Out Children

Research appears to support a structured learning environment for acting-out children.(2) Teachers should not interpret "structure" as implying harshly enforced academic "demands". Rather, teachers should establish reasonable academic expectations and reasonable but, nevertheless, consistently firm consequences for inappropriate behavior.

It is necessary to minimize failure experiences for the child described in Pattern 1. Since such a child doesn't usually refuse to participate in learning experiences the teacher should be more concerned about the difficulty of the language skills being developed rather than attempting to motivate the child to try harder. As the child demonstrates an increased tolerance for frustration the difficulty of his language arts materials can be increased proportionally. A teacher sometimes becomes over-enthusiastic about his success with such a child and increases the difficulty of the child's materials too quickly. Therefore, the teacher must observe the child's behavior carefully and not get in a hurry. Haring and Phillips (7) describe a program which teachers will find useful in teaching such a child.

The child who demonstrates the behavior described in Pattern 2 usually responds favorably to a program of desensitization. Such a program is less concerned with what the child learns and more concerned with developing his attitude toward learning and teachers. It takes a great deal of convincing before such a child believes that schools and teachers aren't all bad. Hewett (8) presents many helpful suggestions for assisting such children.

The child who demonstrates the behavior described in Pattern 3 sometimes profits from being transferred to another teacher since he no longer fears losing face in front of his friends when he demonstrates a willingness to learn. Whether transferred or not it is necessary that his teacher establish firm limits and meaningful (the loss of desired privileges) consequences when the child refuses assignments or disturbs other children.

A great deal of praise and motivational activities such as those described by Miller (9) and Andrews et al. (1) are sometimes effective with the child described in Patterns 4 and 5. Nevertheless, reasonable expectations and consistently firm limits are essential.

Language Arts for Withdrawn Children

The child who appears to fit Pattern 1 responds most favorably to a program in which his teacher pays little attention to his negative behavior but praises and otherwise rewards more mature and productive behavior. The teacher can expect a great deal of resistance initially. However, the results are usually worth the effort and patience.

The child who demonstrates the behavior described in Pattern 2 usually profits from a language arts program similar to the one recommended for the acting-out child described in Pattern 1. However, the teacher may find it necessary to initially offer incentives to get such a child started.

It is necessary that a therapist work with both the parent and the child who appears to fit Pattern 3. The teacher of such a child can be supportive by not expecting a great deal from the child but

nevertheless keeping the child occupied with things which the child enjoys doing until the child's fear is resolved.

Language Arts for Psychotic Children

Treatment facilities and special educational provisions for pre-psychotic and psychotic children are not available in some communities. Therefore, unless a child's behavior is dangerous to himself or others or excessively stigmatizing to the child it is possible to educate such children in the public schools when adequate supportive services are available. For example, it is essential that such children receive a psychiatric and a neurological examination in order to determine whether the child's behavior is functional or due to neurological impairment.

The non-verbal child described in Pattern 1 requires the services of a speech therapist in addition to a modified educational program. Therefore, the language arts program becomes primarily basic speech development until that time when the child can profit from a more academically oriented program.

The child who demonstrates the behavior described in Pattern 2 responds to a highly structured program such as one described by Fenichel.(6) The teacher of such a child will also find the teaching methods and materials of Cruickshank et al.(4) useful.

NEEDED: EDUCATIONAL AND ANCILLARY SERVICES FOR DISTURBED CHILDREN

Obviously, it is necessary that a specialist work with the parents of many disturbed children. It is also necessary that some children receive individualized instruction and that their teachers receive adequate supportive services so that a structured environment can be maintained.

Disturbed children and their parents have traditionally been referred to a specialist without involving children's teachers in the treatment process. However, there appears to be a national trend evolving in which specialists are offering their services to disturbed children's teachers, as well as their parents. Thus, instead of a treatment approach conducted in an office isolated from disturbed children's homes and schools, teachers are being helped to effectively help disturbed children in a portion of their natural milieu--the school. Many school districts are employing such specialists on a full-time basis. However, the need for such specialists is still sorely felt.

Teachers often do not have the time to provide the individualized instruction required by some disturbed children. Such teachers will find the suggestions of Donahue and Nichtern, (5) and Bloomburg and Troupe (3) helpful in engaging and utilizing the services of volunteers.

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